

Introduction to Case Studies of the Iowa Professional Development Model

Selecting Case Study Schools

In the spring of 2003, the Iowa Department of Education (DE) began a series of seminars for Area Education Agency (AEA) teams to explain the Iowa Professional Development Model (IPDM). Each AEA team was invited to work closely with a district as well as a specific school or schools within that district to learn how the IPDM would work. Eventually, 32 school districts worked with their AEA teams, attending seminars together and designing their first trials of the IPDM. The case studies of these districts/schools were developed to illustrate various approaches to implementing the IPDM.

Time and resource limitations made it impossible to study all 32 participating schools. Candidates for inclusion, however, were judged on several factors:

- First, we wanted examples of urban, rural, and suburban schools as well as elementary, middle and high schools.
- Second, we were seeking variety in the ways various schools approached the tasks laid out in the IPDM.
- Third, we were searching for schools that had been particularly successful in completing some portions of the IPDM in order to provide useful models for schools just beginning the process of developing their professional development programs.

We wish to thank the schools and districts who agreed to let us study their initial efforts at implementing the IPDM.

It should be noted here that none of the schools has yet finished the program evaluation portion of the IPDM; the seminars began only ten months ago and most schools will have to wait for ITBS and ITED data in the fall of 2004 to complete their first program evaluation.

The case studies include three rural K-12 districts (each including one elementary, one middle, and one high school), the middle schools of a large urban district, an urban high school, a suburban elementary school and a suburban middle school. The multiple approaches of these schools and districts to designing professional development for improved student growth provide a rich resource for others as they develop their own plans. It was our pleasure to study these schools and we thank them for their cooperation and willingness to be examined before they had everything perfectly worked out.

Initial Responses to Implementation Processes

As is apparent from the case studies, schools implemented a remarkable number of IPDM components during their first trial with the model and were enthusiastic about its effects on faculty and students alike. We hope their early experiences will provide useful illustrations of ways to approach the tasks defined in the IPDM and that their early successes will encourage you as you begin your own implementation of the model.

We were gratified by the overwhelmingly positive response to the model and impressed by the self-correcting behaviors of the schools. Principals and teachers were accurate in pinpointing areas that were problematic for them and were actively making plans to improve their use of the IPDM in their second trial.

Two points were raised spontaneously and repeatedly during our study of these schools. The whole-school focus on a priority student learning need—and the selection of PD content to address that need—have had wonderful, unintended side effects. Interviewees at every school volunteered they had never had such focus on instruction and student learning in conjunction with professional development. They perceived a benefit not only in improved attitudes toward staff development but in a general school atmosphere of optimism and hope that more students could be helped to learn. The second most frequently mentioned aspect of the IPDM was teacher collaboration—the value of such work and its utility in helping them actually implement PD content.

Common problems experienced by the case study schools were in examining research to select the content for professional development and in planning and studying their implementation of new instructional behaviors. These two areas of the IPDM appeared to represent the greatest departure from existing practice. Schools, especially at the secondary level, also struggled with finding appropriate measures for formative data collection. Nearly all the

schools struggled with these areas, although as you read these case studies you will find some creative approaches to solving these issues.

Finally, schools unanimously agreed that time for this kind of professional development was an issue only partially solved to date. Greater time was needed for training, for teacher collaboration and for the work of leadership teams.

Value of Case Studies for the DE and AEAs

Regarding components of the IPDM, districts and schools are struggling with some of the behaviors most new to them; e.g., consulting a research base in a certain area to determine what innovations have been successful with students, writing an implementation plan and studying their implementation, and collecting formative data on student progress toward goals. The DE is working to make research on scientifically supported curriculums and instructional strategies more accessible. The DE and AEAs may need to compile a collection of instruments appropriate for formative data collection in the most common areas of student need. It is clear the DE and AEAs will need to develop capacity to provide technical assistance in these areas.

We've had the sense that AEAs have shied away from working with secondary schools, either because recent professional development foci, at least at the state level, have targeted primary reading or perhaps because elementary schools have been perceived as more receptive to PD assistance. AEAs increasingly will need to direct their efforts to providing content for secondary student learning needs and provide training for whole schools as well as smorgasbords for individuals.